

Narrator:

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Around 250 entrepreneurs from around the world attended the Presidential Summit on Entrepreneurship in Washington April 26th and 27th. One of the most important panels held at the conference had to do with the role of women as entrepreneurs.

Farah Pandith, the U.S. Department of State's special representative to Muslim communities, opened the final panel by saying that women have a "unique opportunity to ignite social change." She said women are role models and agents for long-term change. They can impact generations by setting an example for young girls. And even one person can inspire change on the local level. Through investing in the ideas, the creativity, the passion and vision of women, lives can change inside and outside the home, she said.

Muhammad Yunus, founder of Grameen Bank, was also part of the panel. Yunus told the summit that his business started bringing financial services to poor people, not just poor women. Banks in Bangladesh at the time, he said, gave loans only to people who already had money. At that time, not even 1 percent of the borrowers in the banking system were women. As a result, Yunus started offering himself as a guarantor for women's loans. At first, he said, women were reluctant to borrow funds because of cultural sensitivities. It took six years and a lot of patience, but Grameen Bank eventually achieved a 50-50 ratio of women and men borrowers.

Loans to women brought much more money to the family than loans made to men, Yunus said, and as a result he began to focus on lending to women. Today Grameen Bank has over 8 million borrowers. About 97 percent of them are women, and they own the bank, sitting on the board and making decisions. Other benefits have followed this increase in resources for women entrepreneurs. The children of those women are receiving educations and are building new generations with valuable skills. Now there are 52,000 students in school thanks to Grameen, he said.

These students complain there are no jobs, but Yunus says that is the wrong attitude. He said he tells those students to pledge every morning, "I am not a job seeker. I am a job giver." He encourages them to use their new skills to create new jobs for themselves and many others. In the end, Yunus said, "all human beings are entrepreneurs."

President Obama hosted the summit, which covered issues including technology and innovation, access to capital, unleashing youth and women's entrepreneurship, mentoring and networking, fostering a culture of entrepreneurship, promoting and enabling business, and social entrepreneurship.

As the international crews of space shuttle Discovery and the International Space Station worked together in orbit more than 300 kilometers overhead on April 15th, President

Obama described to an audience at the Kennedy Space Center what the “next chapter” holds for U.S. space exploration.

With only three launches left in NASA’s shuttle program — Atlantis on May 14th, Endeavour on July 29th and Discovery on September 16th — the United States and its international partners are on a new path in how space travel is pursued that will involve more public-private partnerships.

In testimony April 22nd before a Senate subcommittee, NASA Administrator Charles Bolden called Obama’s plan the most visionary policy for real human space exploration since the Kennedy Administration in the early 1960s. The plan, he said, ensures a continuous American presence on the International Space Station, re-establishes a competitive American launch industry, invests in new research and development programs, and builds a technological foundation for sustainable exploration.

The United States also will conduct expeditions in lunar space and unprecedented human missions to near-Earth asteroids and ultimately Mars, Bolden said. The Obama administration does not support a proposed NASA plan to return astronauts to the moon by 2020.

Two U.S. space-transportation companies — Space Exploration Technology Corp. of California and Orbital Sciences of Virginia — are testing supply flights partially funded by NASA for trips to the International Space Station over the next several years.

Since 1996, the Federal Aviation Administration’s Office of Commercial Space Transportation has licensed eight spaceports for operation. Outside the United States, there is great interest in the business of space but fewer strictly commercial space companies. The space programs of Japan, Russia, Europe, China and India are funded by national governments. France’s Arianespace is a quasi-private European space consortium founded in 1980 as the world’s first commercial launch-services provider.

Entrepreneurial company Virgin Galactic, whose \$26 million SpaceShipOne flew to space three times in 2004, becoming the world’s first private manned spacecraft, will build the first commercial vehicles during the test program. The company plans to fly 500 people in the first year of operation and 50,000 in the first 10 years. Passengers will be able to leave their seats and float in the weightlessness of space, enjoying a view of space and Earth stretching for 1,000 miles in every direction.

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